

# TERMITES

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Termite season is upon us once again.

**Are termites everywhere?** Termites occur commonly in Illinois. They are becoming more numerous in the Chicago area than they were many years ago. Colonies of termites may live in a yard for years and never attack buildings. When they destroy an old tree stump they are beneficial, but when they attack buildings they are pests. Termites eat the soft part of the wood, leaving the annual ring intact. The remaining shell is in layers and in a splinter-like condition. Termites seal their runways and feeding areas with mud. Carpenter ants gouge large, smooth areas out of the wood, irrespective of grain. Their galleries are devoid of mud. Powder-post beetles make tiny tunnels in the wood. Fine powdery sawdust is associated with infestations by this beetle. Several fungi cause wood to rot, but the wood appears to be charred or crumbly and no tunnels are eaten in it.

**How can termite infestations be detected?** Swarms of flying termites may appear in the spring. You may notice mud tubes they have built over concrete. Because termites cannot chew through many materials, they build these mud tubes over obstructions. The tubes are usually found on inside basement walls and over outside foundations. You can detect weakened lumber by tapping with an ice pick or screwdriver. If you find that the wood is being sealed with mud and channels are being eaten out, examine it closely for further evidence of termites.

**How soon will structural damage occur?** Termites may feed in wood buildings for years before they do any serious structural damage. Little serious damage occurs until the colony is eight to ten years old unless the ground contained a large population before a building was constructed.

## How to Recognize Termites

**What are termites?** These colonial insects feed on wood or wood products, such as paper. Protozoa in their digestive tracts convert the cellulose into usable food.

In a termite colony there are three readily recognizable castes of termites: the primary or reproductive caste or flying termites, the soldiers, and the workers. The workers are white to cream colored and about 1/8 inch long by 1/32 inch wide. They are the most numerous individuals in the colony. The soldiers resemble the workers in color and size of body, but have a large brown head that is over one-third the length of the body. As the name implies, they guard the colony in times of danger.

Once each year the black-winged kings and queens, the primary reproductive caste, swarm from the colony. The time is usually late winter and spring or on rare occasions late summer and fall. After mating, they shed their wings, and the queen begins to lay eggs from which the workers develop. If food is not available, the colony perishes. Although thousands of swarmlers may emerge from a colony, very few manage to survive.

Another form, closely resembling the workers, is the secondary reproductive caste. If the queen dies or is separated from the colony, members of this caste can lay eggs and the colony will continue. This phenomenon is not uncommon in termite colonies. In old, established colonies the queen may be present, and the secondary reproductives may be laying eggs also.

**How can flying ants and flying termites be distinguished?** A flying termite is always black. A flying ant may be black, but many species may be yellow, tan, or almost red. The hind wings of an ant are noticeably shorter than the forewings; the two pairs of wings of a termite are equal. An ant has a constricted or narrow waist just behind the wing-bearing section of the body; the termite has no such constriction. Antennae of termites are straight, whereas those of ants are elbowed.

**Where is the colony located?** Because termite colonies require a constant supply of moisture, they are located in the soil. The queen is in a chamber in the soil, often several feet in the ground. The workers forage for wood in the soil, and in this search may enter a building where the food supply is almost limitless.

**How do they enter a building?** Termites can find many entries into a building. Wood in contact with soil provides an unexposed path into the building. Basement windows, porches, door sills, wood supports through the concrete slab, and siding touching the soil are a few of the ways. Cracks in concrete foundations and open voids in concrete block foundations are also hidden avenues of entrance. When no wood touches the soil and no entry-ways are available, termites will build mud tubes over the foundation and up into the building. People who are under the impression a brick house is free of termites are wrong. In this case they are readily detected.

**Why do they build tubes?** The humidity throughout the entire colony must remain fairly constant. Termites perish rapidly under dry conditions, and they build these mud tubes to maintain the correct humidity. Not only do they build these tubes over obstructions, but the feeding area in wood is also sealed. This mud will be apparent wherever termites are feeding. Whenever the mud seal is broken, they immediately repair the damage to the tube.

Termite control problems are extremely complicated and require an experienced exterminator.

## Selecting a Dependable Pest Control Operator

Termite control must be done by a qualified exterminator because application of the chemical entails special knowledge and equipment. There may be a nominal fee for termite inspections and if termites are present the pest control operator will present an estimate of how much it will cost to eradicate the termite problem.

Most companies give excellent service and are a benefit to their community. To help you select a dependable exterminating company: (1) Consult your telephone yellow pages; (2) See if the company is a member of the Illinois Pest Control Association. To be a member of this Association the company must be an established company and show adequate finan-





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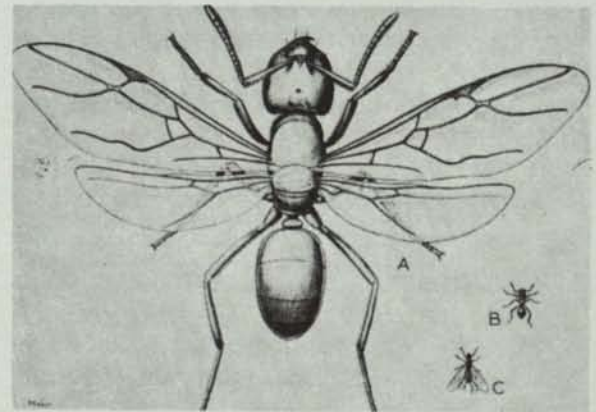
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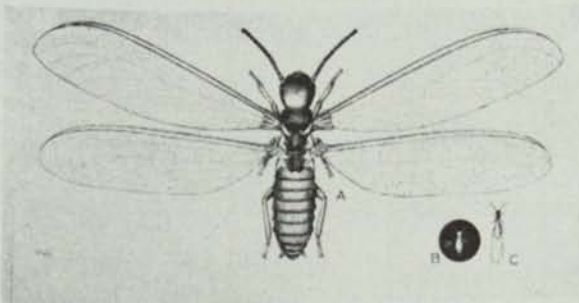
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cial responsibility. Membership in a trade association is an indication of responsible, ethical performance. These are the more progressive companies, being up to date on the latest chemicals and techniques of pest control; (3) Comparative estimates may be advantageous; (4) Ask the company representative any questions you may have about their methods of termite control.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Before you purchase a building, make sure it's checked for termites and other wood-destroying insects. If building a new structure inquire about pretreatment for termites. It could save you a lot of money and worry.



Enlarged view of winged ant



Enlarged view of winged termite

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